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ABSTRACT

The Wheel of Right Action and the "WHOOPS! Quotient" both offer students an opportunity to integrate values and ethics into real world situations. The Whoops! Quotient asks students to respond to questions regarding how often they have heard or have made statements of a "white lie" nature within the past week. Responses are tallied and a total score indicates how sensitive an individual is to the language that shapes reality and the behavior of others. The Wheel of Right Action incorporates the notion of action by asking students to define a "value," explain when they have used the value last, and asks them to respond to how they might treat the value differently in the future. As well as being instruments in teaching sensitive use of language, the "WHOOPS! Quotient" and the Wheel of Right Action can be used as a bridge into issues such as trust in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relations, consequences as an inherent factor in choice behavior, and development of life values. (Contains 10 references. The WHOOPS! Quotient worksheet, the Wheel of Right Action, and rules for the Wheel of Right Action game are attached.) (RS)

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ED 369 123

The 'WHOOPS! Quotient' and the Wheel of Right Action: Interactive Methods for Teaching Ethics and Values in the Classroom

Presented to the Speech Communication Association

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The erosion of moral and ethical values is one reason for the prevalence of more lying in our lives--for indeed the liar is by definition, a person without ethics.

M. Hirsh Goldberg *The Book of Lies*

Introduction

We saw the permissive 60's generation move to a "Me Generation" in the 80's, and we now see a strong shift toward ethics and values in the 90's. This change is fed by the concern over the nation's drug problem, crime, teen suicide, and as Kirschenbaum (1992) claims, "a virtual ethical vacuum in government" (p. 772). Educators are calling for schools to become involved in instructing students in ethical issues and values. Yet, incorporating ways to effectively introduce ethical decision making into our classrooms is much more problematic. As a student recently stated in class, "This is a communication class, not a class on ethics. I don't see what ethics has to do with this course." Helping students to first understand the importance of studying ethics and secondly, finding innovative ways to introduce ethics and values in the classroom is always an important consideration.

Incorporating ethics in all college courses is a current topic. Gustafson (1991) points to a number of signs which contribute to a growing concern for teaching ethics including: more attention by philosophers and the media about moral issues, establishment of ethics centers, publications on business and medical ethics, and more conferences dealing with ethical issues. Just as writing across the curriculum has become a way of life on many campuses, now we hear "Ethics across the curriculum" touted by college committees. Many students have become desensitized toward what they believe is right and wrong. When asked to select a topic for persuasive speaking about which they feel very strongly and must take a stand, instructors hear, "I'm not sure what I feel strongly about. How can I take a stand when I don't know what I feel is right or wrong?"

It is our belief that an integrated approproach which calles for students to become actively involved in the decision making, and problem solving process works best. First, an applied

approach asks students to examine ethical issues from "their" point of view as opposed to the point of view of the instructor. Second, when students are involved in discussion about values and ethics, and can apply the information discussed to aspects of their lives, the students "own" their comments and retention is increased.

This paper presents two strategies for introducing the topic of ethics and values in the classroom setting. First, a discussion of the "WHOOPS! Quotient" that describes a way of thinking about how lying impacts our every day lives. Second, a discussion of the Wheel of Right Action as a method for expressing ideas about values.

The "WHOOPS! Quotient"

In childhood many of us heard and most likely recited the taunt "liar, liar, pants on fire" to our playmates when we caught them in a deception, whether it involved neighborhood games or broken juvenile promises to one another. Just as we used the accusative rhyme to our young friends, we use "adult" language to create our own personal reality and to reflect our sense of ethical standards and behaviors. Words describe, explain, soothe, incite, persuade, and generally convey some meaning of our sense of the world. It is through our use of language that our perception of "events" is determined and, subsequently, our "reality" is defined. In this instance, reality is used to include both the way we look at the world and the way we behave. To illustrate, which would you prefer: to order a minced cow sandwich or a hamburger? to talk about slick, sleazy spaghetti or smooth, al dente pasta? to have dough ooze through your fingers or to work the dough?

This conceptual approach to understanding the use of language is also advocated in the Whorf-Sapir Hypothesis which stipulates that we use language to shape our own behavior as well as the behavior of others. In addition to impacting perception, our use of language influences our credibility, status and self-esteem and reflects attitudes, interest and responsibility.

As we use language to create reality, we also use language to indicate our sense of ethical standards and behaviors. We have all been admonished since childhood that "honesty is the best policy," "lying will always get you into trouble," "it is easier to tell the truth than to try to keep

track of your lies," etc. Yet, we often lie in our daily conversation; in particular, we often use "little white lies" as a means of relating to others. We also lie as a "forced" reaction--i.e., lying to conform because it is expected of us. We defend our behavior by saying we don't want to hurt someone's feelings, or there just wasn't a good way to say no, or it wasn't politically expedient to be honest. Whatever our chosen line of defense, we promote unethical behavior when we lie; whether the lie be white, purple, green, or merely blatant. People often fail to consider the myriad of ways in which deception spreads and erodes personal as well as societal integrity and trustworthiness (Bok, 1990, pp. 26-27).

> Trust is a social good to be protected just as much as the air we breathe or the water we drink. When it is damaged, the community as a whole suffers; and when it is destroyed, societies falter and collapse. (Bok, 1991, pp. 26-27)

In fields such as government, law, public relations, and health care, duplicity is an acceptable--on occasion recommended--form of behavior: "Politics as usual" is S.O.P. Professionally, only one industry is noted for its honesty. Interestingly enough that industry is bookmaking. Rosecrance (1987) noted that "...illegal bookmakers are constrained to be scrupulously honest in dealing with their customers; failure to do so results in immediate loss of business" (p. 7). He further elaborated that customers demand honesty from their bookmakers, and they get it. Rosecrance also acknowledged that "the challenge for the business community and its customers is to structure business in such a way that ethical conduct pays off" (p. 11). That particular approach gives credence to the question: Are we ethical only when we are forced to be so? Wolk and Henley (1970) admonish that "the suspicion is that any organization operating under a policy of total candor will falter or fail--and sooner rather than later" (p. 13). They further tell us that "candor in the workaday world has become equated with stupidity" (p. 13).

How much a part of the day-to-day business ethic is based upon lying? Does the acceptance of lying during business, or any other activity, encourage a climate of deceit? Does lying really serve as an aid in dealing with the complications of problem-solving? Are "white lies" an

acceptable form of behavior while other forms of lying are not? What is the cumulative effect of white lies? Are there any circumstances under which "white lies" are the preferred form of behavior although those lies may be promoting unethical behavior or standards? There are a myriad of questions surrounding lying as a standard form of communicative behavior. One series of questions focuses upon the white lie. The white lie is considered by many to be a less dangerous or harmful tactic than other types of lies though? The person telling the white lie is still promoting deception, and there is a cumulative effect that can be as damaging as any other type of lie. The frequency with which people apparently feel comfortable telling white lies reveal insights into the general acceptance of unethical behaviors in today's society. Adler and Towne (1989) report that in one study involving 130 subjects, only slightly more than a third of the statements used in everyday conversation were totally honest (p. 309). Some motives cited for being deceitful included avoiding embarrassment, avoiding tension, guiding social interaction, and gaining power.

A step in attacking the question of the role of lying in today's world could be to ask ourselves how often we use the "little white lie" as a means of shaping our own reality and perception of the world. An important, basic assumption is that lying in any form is a behavior of choice. Making a choice to lie includes formulating a criteria or set of standards for what constitutes acceptable behavior under what kind of circumstances and for what reasons or motives. The flip side of the coin of behavior choice is the freedom to choose not to lie.

What is your "WHOOPS! Quotient"? How sensitive are you to the frequency with which you pepper your communication with white lies? As noted by Bok (1978), "To the extent that we train ourselves to see [the ramifications of white lies] and succeed in eliminating them from our speech, the need to resort to them will diminish" (p. 72). For example, how often do you use some of the following comments in the course of responding to others? "I'll just be a minute." "Excuse me, I have a call on another line." "I'll give you a call." "I haven't been waiting long." Are these comments truly honest responses, or are they responses used to deal with a situation that could turn into an awkward interaction? How can you reword these responses so that they are truthful yet do not offend or hurt the person to whom they are said? Is there a difference in your

response pattern in your professional life as contrasted to your personal life?

The "WHOOPS! Quotient" (Appendix A) asks students to respond to questions regarding how often they have heard or have made statements of a "white lie" nature within the past week. Responses are tallied and a total score indicates how sensitive an individual is to the language that shapes reality and the behavior of others. The instrument can be used in any communication class to facilitate discussion of ethical concepts.

The Wheel of Right Action

"Ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means character and, in the plural, manners" (Beck & Orr, 1970, p. xiii). Much of what we perceive as ethical depends in part on the values we hold. Our values and belief systems influence our actions; they provide us with guidelines for our behavior. Values have different interpretations for almost everyone. Understanding values is one thing, applying our values to every day situations is yet another.

At the Third Annual National Conference on Ethics in America held in Long Beach California in February of 1992 several themes emerged as important for understanding ethical principles. The areas of truth, love, right action, peace and nonviolence were highlighted. Bruckner (1992) relates these areas to communication skills such as attentive listening and respect for the person talking to us. DeVito (1991) claims that ethics in communication is complicated by the fact that it is so interwoven with one's personal philosophy. It is difficult to propose ethical guidelines for everyone. "The decisions we make concerning communication must be guided by what we consider right as well as by what we consider effective " (p. 11).

Students need to explore what they value. Since values are the locus of control for our beliefs and actions, effective teaching of this concept should include the action dimension in the teaching process (Bruckner, 1992). The Wheel of Right Action (Appendix B) incorporates the notion of action by asking students to define a value, explain when they have used the value last, and goes further by asking them to respond to how they might treat that value differently in the future. Students are given the opportunity to verbalize ideas about values and how the value relates to them. In our fast pace world how often do we stop to think about "Inner Silence?" "Do I value

time alone? What about duty? Is it a duty to be faithful to the wishes of parents, teachers, our country?" These are questions that students begin to ask themselves as they become involved in the Wheel of Right Action.

Values are incorporated in the Wheel of Right Action. The procedure for the activity involves selecting two teams. An individual turns the spinner found on the game board shown in Appendix B. After the spinner lands on a value the individual must define the value from his or her perspective. Help from the group may be solicited. The teacher ensures that all viewpoints are treated with respect. The value must be defined so that the other groups accepts the definition. The students must then explain a time when the value has come up in their life. For example, when the spinner landed on the term "respect" my students defined it in the following terms: to value opinions and thoughts or another--to honor someone--letting someone have their own thoughts. In this example a female students comment concerned her being home at the time her Mom had set curfew. She was a college student living at home, and explained to the class that she respected her mother even though her boyfriend thought that she was wrong. After some discussion the class agreed that she had done the right thing, for her, even though others stated that they would attempt to work something different out with the Mom. Her comment was, "I can't disrespect my Mom."

It is important for the instructor to take the role of a facilitator, and not make judgment on the students responses. This is not always easy to do. Each individuals comments must be respected, and it must be stressed that there is no "right" or "wrong" response.

Student comments were very positive regarding the activity. One students stated, "the more I learn the more I want to apply all this knowledge." Students who had never spoken out in class voiced opinions during the activity.

The Wheel of Right Action can be easily incorporated in interpersonal communication or in a public speaking classes. For interpersonal, I used it after discussing relationships and integrated it into the discussion of "What do you value most in a relationship?" Explain to the students that it is important first to get in touch with what they value. For public speaking, the activity works well

during persuasion to discuss value propositions. I first get them discussing values with the wheel exercise, and then we generate possible arguments for speech topics. An open discussion in both classes helps students to apply the information to their lives.

We recommend that you give the wheel a try. Seymour E. Harris said it best in the following remark:

> It may be that we should stop putting so much emphasis in our own minds on the monetary value of a college education and put more emphasis on the intangible social and cultural values to be derived from learning. The time may be coming when we will have to start accepting the idea that education is life, not merely a preparation for it.
>
> *The Forbes Scrapbook of Thoughts on the Business of Life II*

Conclusion

Values are different for each individual. One cannot espouse ones values and think everyone will believe one way. But if students sit silently not having the opportunity to verbalize what they value, then they miss a rare opporutnity to reach inside themselves for what really matters. The Wheel of Right Action and the "WHOOPS! Quotient" both offer students an opportunity to integrate values and ethics into real world situations. We have found them useful tools in the classroom.

If we as educators are unwilling to defend lying or unethical behavior as necessary and acceptable, what strategies need to be employed to bring about change?

If change is the answer, true change in developing ethical behaviors can and must start with the individual. This is where you can make a difference. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that each individual can make a difference in their behavior by expanding their facility in using the English language and learning to listen to themselves as they speak. You already incorporate these principles in your teaching; all you need to do is relate those principles to ethics, values, and behavioral choices.

On the organizational level, attention can be given to the fact that government and corporate structures can be structured so that ethical behavior pays off. Laws, policies, and regulations need to be examined to see how they promote and encourage deception--e.g., divorce laws, health care

practices, welfare incentives, income tax laws, truth-in-lending, truth-in advertising, truth-in-packaging. Appropriate changes can subsequently be recommended and adopted. Institutional practices--e.g., hiring policies, personnel evaluations, letters of recommendation, work assignments--also need to be examined on a systemic basis to determine if they promote deceptive practices. If they do, suitable training and monitoring programs should be implemented to develop ethical behaviors among employees. Pressure across all segments of the work environment, including education, that fosters deceptive behavior needs to be identified and defined. Standards need to be developed that bring organizational goals, personal goals, and incentives for achievement into harmony.

Our students need to be taught, both conceptually and by modeling, how to deal effectively and ethically with these and related issues. As well as being an instrument in teaching sensitive use of language, the "Whoops!' Quotient" and The Wheel of Right Action can be used as an bridge into issues such as trust in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relations, consequences as an inherent factor in choice behavior, and development of life values. As professional educators in the field of communication we are in more of a position to be leaders in the development of ethical constructs in the leaders of the future than our colleagues in other disciplines.

As children we rejected unethical behavior by chanting "liar, liar pants on fire." Are we willing to take an equally strong stance as professional adults? The choice is ours!

Trust and integrity are precious resources,
easily squandered, hard to regain.
They can thrive only on a foundation of
respect and veracity.

Sissela Bok Lying: Moral Choice in
Public and Private Life

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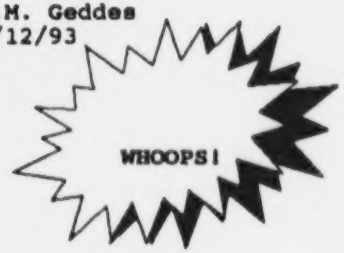

What is your WHOOPS! Quotient? How sensitive are you to the way you use language to shape your reality and the behavior of others? Indicate in the appropriate blank at the right of each statement listed below the number of times you have either heard or made that statement, or a very similar statement, within the past week. For example, if you have either said or heard statement #1 five times in the past week, put a "5" in Column B. If you have not heard or said statement #1 in the past week, put a "0" in Column D.

		A (1-3 times)	B (4-6 times)	C (7 or more times)	D (None)
1.	I'll just be a minute. (Translation: I'm going to finish what I'm doing before I deal with you.)	____	____	____	____
2.	Let's get together for lunch. I'll give you a call. (Translation: I need to "move on.")	____	____	____	____
3.	Everything's taken care of. (Translation: Don't ask any more questions or make any more suggestions.)	____	____	____	____
4.	The check is in the mail. (Translation: As soon as I get lose from you I'm going to check to see what is going on.)	____	____	____	____
5.	I love your new _____. (hairdo, coat, car, etc.) (Translation: I've got to have some type of small talk to connect with this individual.)	____	____	____	____
6.	That's nice! (Translation: I could really care less what you just said.)	____	____	____	____
7.	I'm sorry to bother you, but.... (Translation: I want your attention; this is important enough to me to interrupt you.)	____	____	____	____
	Page 1 Subtotals:				

		A (1-3 times)	B (4-6 times)	C (7 or more times)	D (None)
8.	I don't know. (Translation: I'm really not interested in what you are asking; or, I'm really not interested in you.)	____	____	____	____
9.	No problem. (Translation: If this is what it will take to make you happy or to encourage you to "go away, "so be it. or There's a problem, but I'm not going to admit it.)	____	____	____	____
10.	You did a good job. (Translation: I guess that's the best I can expect at the moment. The quality of the work was really less than desired.)	____	____	____	____
11.	You don't have any objections, do you? (Translation: This is what I am going to do!)	____	____	____	____
12.	Can I have a minute of your time? (Translation: I want your attention/help now.)	____	____	____	____
13.	The secretary is working on it. (Translation: I have no earthly idea what you are talking about.)	____	____	____	____
14.	I lost track of time. (Translation: I've got more important things to do right now.)	____	____	____	____
15.	I don't remember anything about it. (Translation: Why don't you take care of that yourself?)	____	____	____	____
16.	I have jet lag. (Translation: I'm tired and brain dead, don't bug me.)	____	____	____	____
17.	You have to forgive me--I'm not normally like this. (Translation: I have no earthly idea of how to respond to you.)	____	____	____	____

Page 2 Subtotals:

		A (1-3 times)	B (4-6 times)	C (7 or more times)	D (None)
18.	Everybody else does it. (Translation: I really want to do this and see no reason why I shouldn't.)	____	____	____	____
19.	That's not my department. (Translation: I'm tired of trying to deal with that particular problem without the authority/ability.)	____	____	____	____
20.	The computer's down. (Translation: This is going to take me a while.)	____	____	____	____
21.	We must have misplaced your original request. (Translation: I have no idea what you are talking about.)	____	____	____	____
22.	I don't have the authority to approve that. (Translation: This looks like it could turn into a sticky situation and I don't want to get involved if I don't have to.)	____	____	____	____
23.	I didn't think it would matter just this once. (Translation: I didn't think I would get caught.)	____	____	____	____
24.	We've (I've) made other plans. (Translation: I don't care to be involved.)	____	____	____	____
25.	I have a call on another line. or I have a call on call waiting. (Translation: This conversation is boring and I've got other things to do.)	____	____	____	____
26.	I'm not really sure but ..... (Translation: I know precisely what I'm talking about and I hope you listen.)	____	____	____	____
27.	At your convenience.... (Translation: I have to wait on you; you're in the driver's seat.)	____	____	____	____
	Page 3 Subtotals:				

		A (1-3 times)	B (4-6 times)	C (7 or more times)	D (None)
28.	Oh, I haven't been waiting long. (Translation: I was getting ready to send out for a sleeping cot.)	____	____	____	____
29.	You're absolutely right. (Translation: Whatever you want is okay with me; I give up.)	____	____	____	____
30.	Let's just say that we're both to blame. (Translation: Actually, you are responsible, but I don't want to drag the situation out any further.)	____	____	____	____
31.	Forgive me but I have to run. I hope we'll meet/talk again soon. (Translation: I want out of here.)	____	____	____	____
32.	How nice to see you. (Translation: Why did I have to run into you now?)	____	____	____	____
33.	It was a pleasure doing business with you (having you as a client.) (Translation: If I never see you again that will be okay with me.)	____	____	____	____
34.	I would love to have dinner. Let me call you next week. (Translation: I can't think of an excuse right now, but I'll have one ready when I call.)	____	____	____	____
35.	I don't have any change. (Translation: You're a street person and not worth my charity.)	____	____	____	____
36.	Excuse me? (Translation: Are you out of your ever lovin' mind?)	____	____	____	____
37.	Great! (Translation: Not again!)	____	____	____	____

Page 4 Subtotals

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		A (1-3 times)	B (4-6 times)	C (7 or more times)	D (None)
38.	I just can't find the time.... (Translation: That simply isn't one of my priorities.)	____	____	____	____
39.	We/I gave at the office. (Translation: Don't bother me. or I'm not interested in/willing to support your cause.)	____	____	____	____
40.	I just work here. (Translation: I don't approve of .... but I'm not willing to put forth the effort to try to change things. or Don't bother me.)	____	____	____	____
41	I'll be home right after work. (Translation: I will get there when I can.)	____	____	____	____
42.	As long as you're happy. (Translation: I don't approve, but I'm not going to fight. or I wish you wouldn't.)	____	____	____	____
43.	I'll get right on that. (Translation: Leave me alone. I'll get to it.)	____	____	____	____
44.	That's interesting. (Translation: I could care less.)	____	____	____	____
45.	Come by sometime! (Translation: Please; don't ever come by.)	____	____	____	____
46.	I'll get back to you. (Translation: Leave me alone. or I don't want to be bothered right now.)	____	____	____	____
47.	I lost your telephone number. (Translation: I had hoped I'd never see you again.)	____	____	____	____
48.	I didn't hear you call me. (Translation: I was hoping that if I ignored you long enough you'd leave me alone.)	____	____	____	____

Page 5 Subtotals

Tally Columns and Pages

	A	B	C	D
Page 1	_____	_____	_____	_____
Page 2	_____	_____	_____	_____
Page 3	_____	_____	_____	_____
Page 4	_____	_____	_____	_____
Page 5	_____	_____	_____	_____

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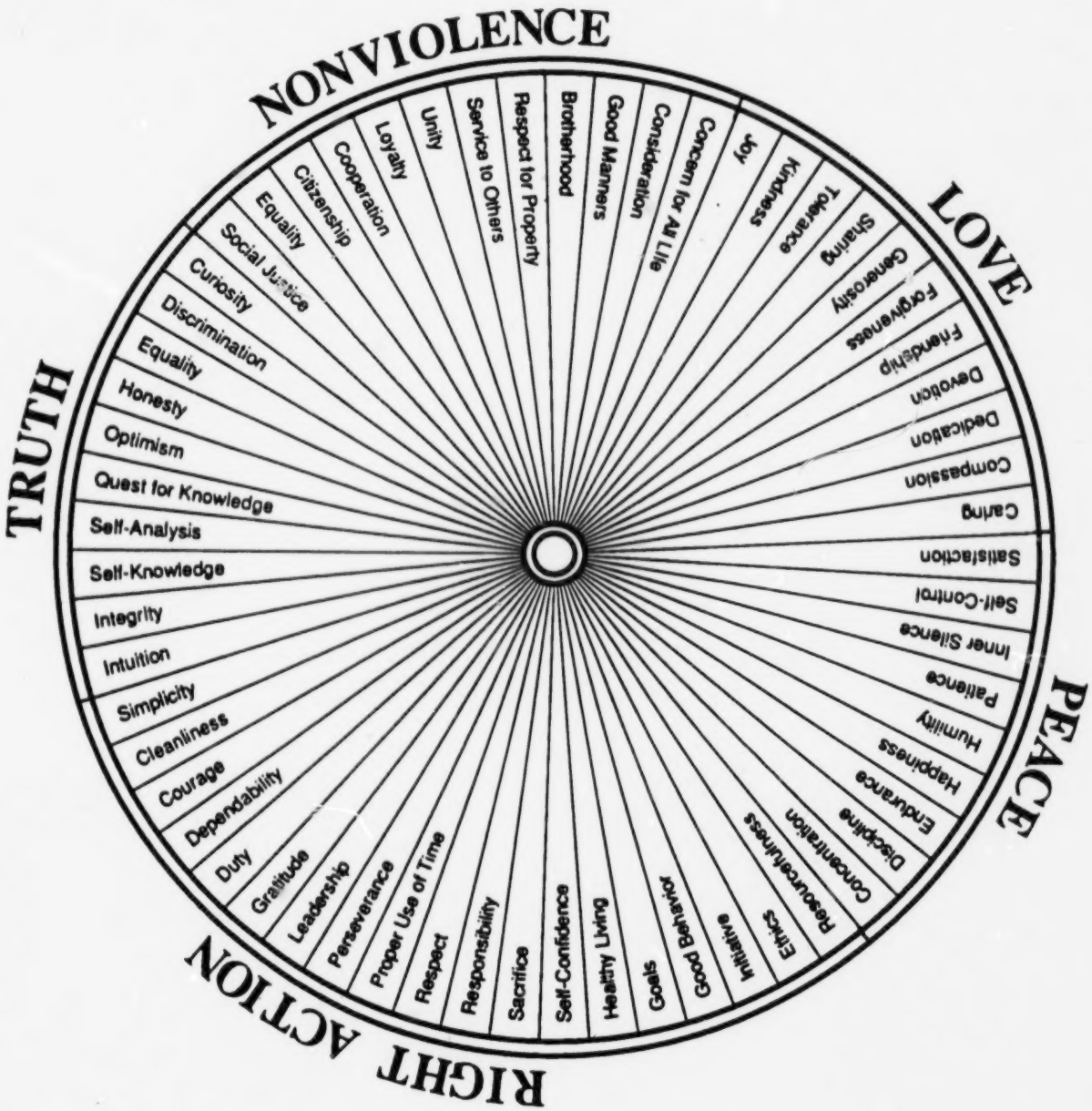
WHEEL OF RIGHT ACTION



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The Wheel of Right Action Game

1. Create two teams. There is also a time keeper who can be the teacher.

2. One person from the team spins the spinner on the game board. That person then must describe the meaning of that value to the other team. If not known, he or she may consult the team for help. The word must be defined to other teams satisfaction.

3. The individual then provides an example where that particular value was used in his/her life. (The team can again be consulted). I found that an individual from the group would provide a clear example and the person who was the spinner just had to act as a facilitator at that time.

4. Finally, the person must describe a situation where he or she would like to apply the value next or how that value could be used in the future.

5. The game ends when the set time limit is over; for example after 30 minutes.

Materials Needed:

1. A large poster board with the Wheel of Right Action drawn as illustrated on the next page.

Special notes:

A. Let the student's do the talking. Act truly as a facilitator.

B. If the other team starts to define and give examples, make sure the team responsible has the chance to define and explain first. The other team may disagree, then discussion can follow.

C. At times you might want to ask if the person did the "right" action. This gets a great deal of discussion going.

I found that students who had never talked in class were giving examples. They all came up with interesting situations that I had never thought about. The students who did not openly talk in the group I found were talking quietly to people around them. The activity makes you think of examples when these values have come up.